ROBERTO RICCIUTI

Politics

Police Told Hayley Kiyoko She Couldn't Bring Drag Queens On Stage in Nashville

The singer said an undercover cop warned her during sound check not to bring drag performers on stage.

BY JAMES FACTORA
MAY 4, 2023

This article was originally published by Them.

Hayley Kiyoko has spoken out after being told she couldn't bring drag queens on stage due to a new Tennessee law banning some drag performances.

The "Girls Like Girls" singer posted a video to Instagram on Monday night, just before she was set to go on stage at Nashville's Marathon Music Works. She shared that she had been "upset, but now this is just unbelievable."

Instagram content

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"I am getting ready for my show tonight and was really excited to bring out some incredible drag performances," Kiyoko said. Tearing up, she explained that she was confronted by an undercover cop during sound check and told that because her show was all ages, she couldn't feature drag performers. "So we're trying to figure out if there's a workaround or what the situation is, but this is fucked up," she added.

Tennessee recently enacted the nation's first ban on drag performances, which prohibits "adult cabaret performances" (including drag shows) from taking place in public, or anywhere where they could be seen by a minor. A first violation of the law is a misdemeanor offense with a potential jail sentence of 11 months and 29 days; subsequent violations are counted as felonies with a prison sentence of up to six years and a fine of up to $3,000.

The Tennessee law was temporarily blocked by a federal judge for violating the First Amendment in April, just days before it was set to be enacted; that injunction is set to expire May 26. The plaintiffs in the suit argued that the law unconstitutionally restricts speech and that it is overly vague. Although the bill classifies drag shows as "adult cabaret performances," that term itself is not clearly defined. Since the law is the first of its kind, these vague definitions worried advocates, who feared that any drag performance (or display of public gender non-conformity) could be interpreted as obscene by law enforcement.

It's unclear why Kiyoko was approached by police regarding her show's drag performances despite the judge's injunction in the law's enforcement. Yet Kiyoko proceeded to bring the drag performers — Lady LiberTea and Ivy St. James — on stage as planned anyway. In her Instagram caption, the singer wrote that the queens arrived 10 minutes before the show was set to start, and that she told them about the legal concerns. But the performers "showed no fear and said they wanted to continue with the show and come out on stage."

The singer finished her Instagram caption by writing, "I never want to put anyone in a position to be at risk or in danger in any way. But also where is the line of being silenced? How do we navigate these absurd threats and laws against our community?"

"I find pride in making sure my concerts are safe places for ALL," she continued. "How can I do that if we aren't allowed to be ourselves, especially at a predominantly queer concert? We deserve to have a safe space to be ourselves while we navigate the evil that is threatening our own existence."

KEYWORDS LGBTQ RIGHTS LGBTQ DRAG HAYLEY KIYOKO TENNESSEE NASHVILLE POLICE

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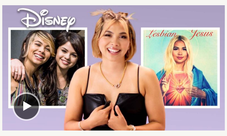

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